

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Trail Mountain Coal Refuse Fires project

eAMLIS Keys: UT-044 & UT-069

Introduction

The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) has reviewed the Environmental Assessment (EA) submitted by the Utah Abandoned Mine Reclamation Program (AMRP) in support of the Trail Mountain Coal Refuse Fires project. This EA was developed pursuant to 516 DM 13.5 B. (33) which specifically bars mine fires and refuse fires from Categorical Exclusion-level analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act. Under the Preferred Alternative, OSMRE would provide Authorization to Proceed (ATP) to AMRP to expend federal Abandoned Mine Land (AML) grant funds to extinguish the Trail Mountain Coal Refuse Fires. The work would entail excavating and quenching, then regrading and revegetating burning coal waste piles at the former Helco Mine and Seagull Mine sites, both located in Emery County, Utah. Both sites were ignited by the Trail Mountain wildfire which began in June, 2018 as a prescribed burn within the Manti-La Sal National Forest.

Reason

The Trail Mountain Coal Refuse Fires have been ranked as Priority 2 public health and safety hazards by AMRP. This classification and the need for the Preferred Alternative are based on the danger of the fires igniting nearby vegetation and causing another wildfire; the risk of spreading environmental degradation related to the wildfire, such as vegetation mortality; potential for mass wasting; and degraded air quality related to emissions from the fires.

Under the Preferred Alternative, OSMRE would authorize the Utah AMRP to extinguish the Trail Mountain Coal Refuse Fires by way of excavating and quenching the burning coal waste, then regrading and revegetating the affected areas, totaling approximately 2.05 acres of surface disturbance.

Context 40 CFR 1508.27(a)

To determine whether the Preferred Alternative would have a significant effect on the human environment, impacts related to the Preferred Alternative were analyzed in terms of context and intensity based on the criteria at 40 CFR 1508.27(b). The Preferred Alternative project area includes the former Helco Mine and Seagull Mine sites where seven hot spots have been detected via infrared camera. The coal waste fires are located in Meetinghouse Canyon and Rilda Canyon, between ten and twelve miles northwest of Huntington, Utah. Both sites lie within the Rilda Canyon USGS 7.5 minute quadrangle. The Preferred Alternative would result in approximately 2.05 acres of surface disturbance. The Preferred Alternative is project-specific and any impacts would be likely realized at the local, rather than regional, national, or global levels.

Affected interests include recreational Manti-La Sal National Forest users whose physical safety is impacted by the refuse fires (the Preferred Alternative has the support of the Ferron District Ranger); PacifiCorp, which is actively reclaiming a permitted topsoil stockpile in Rilda Canyon, upstream of the Helco Mine site; and the North Emery Water Users Special Service District (NEWUSSD) which maintains spring collection boxes in Rilda Canyon, also upstream of the

Helco Mine site. PacifiCorp's topsoil stockpile has been serving double duty as a berm directing debris-laden side canyon stream flow into Rilda Creek and away from NEWUSSD's spring collection boxes. Under the Preferred Alternative, construction activities would be coordinated and temporary drainage controls would be implemented such that PacifiCorp might reclaim its topsoil stockpile without jeopardizing NEWUSSD's spring collection boxes, AMRP extinguishes the Helco Mine and Seagull Mine coal refuse fires and reclaims the project area, and finally Emery County constructs its own protective berm where PacifiCorp's topsoil stockpile had been.

Intensity 40 CFR 1508.27(b)

(1) The following resources were analyzed in the Trail Mountain Coal Refuse Fires EA for beneficial and adverse impacts. A significant effect may exist even if OSMRE believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.

Historic and Cultural

No historic properties are present at either the former Seagull Mine or Helco Mine. As such, there would be little to no impact to historic and cultural resources related to the Preferred Alternative. Tribal consultation was conducted by the US Forest Service, Price Ranger District in May, 2019. No sites of tribal importance are known to exist within the project area. There would be no little to no impact to historic and cultural resources under the No Action Alternative.

Hydrology

The Preferred Alternative would not modify or alter any waterways or water bodies and there would be no water depletion from the Forest. Temporary drainage controls would be used during the project to help ensure any hydrologic impacts are minor and temporary. It is expected the Preferred Alternative would result in a long term improvement upon current hydrologic conditions. There would be little to no impact to hydrologic resources under the No Action Alternative.

Vegetation

The project area for the Preferred Alternative was previously disturbed by mining activities and burned by wildfire in 2018. A total surface disturbance of 2.05 acres is expected. All disturbed areas would be pocked and seeded with the Trail Mountain Fires Seed Mix. Impacts to vegetation would be minor and temporary and should represent an improvement upon current conditions in the long term. Under the No Action Alternative, the refuse fires could spread to remaining surrounding vegetation, contribute to continued plant mortality, and the spread of noxious weeds.

Fish and Wildlife

A total of eight federally protected species with the potential to occur in or near the project area were identified using data available through the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources. All eight species were evaluated and eliminated from further review based on the following criteria: the species' known geographic ranges; whether the Preferred Alternative project area contains necessary conditions similar to those known to support the species; and whether the project would remove or adversely affect any habitat of the

species. No critical habitat exists within the project area. Little to no impact to fish and wildlife resources is expected under the Preferred Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, wildlife habitat would continue to be negatively affected by vegetative mortality.

Soils

Under the Preferred Alternative, the soil resource is expected to be positively impacted. Extinguishing the refuse fires would protect remaining vegetation and promote natural revegetation. Erosion control blanketing and log terracing would assist in the stabilization and revegetation processes. Under the No Action Alternative, local soil resources would continue to erode as vegetative mortality continues. Soil conditions would degrade as coal waste burns to ash, altering the pH and increasing in erodibility.

Recreation

Little to no impact to the recreation resource value is expected under the Preferred Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, surface instability plus heat and gas emissions related to the refuse fires would continue to pose a safety threat to recreational users.

Air Quality

Under the Preferred Alternative, an overall improvement to air quality is expected with suppression of the fires. Construction activities would cause minor, temporary dust impacts to the local area. The fires would likely continue to burn and emit gasses and smoke into the atmosphere under the No Action Alternative.

Noise, Topography, Paleontology

Little to no impact is expected for noise, topography, or paleontology values under the Preferred Alternative or the No Action Alternative.

(2) The degree to which the Preferred Alternative affects public health or safety.

The Preferred Alternative's effect on local public health and safety would be moderate and positive. Manti-La Sal National Forest users are currently subject to surface instability and heat and gas emissions in the areas near the refuse fires. Under the Preferred Alternative, AMRP would extinguish the burning coal refuse, eliminating the heat and gas hazard, and stabilize the project area through regrading and revegetating. Emery County would finally build a berm, partially within the Helco Mine project area footprint, to ensure the continued protection of NEWUSSD spring collection boxes from debris flows in Rilda Canyon. Revegetation monitoring would be the responsibility of the Forest Service.

(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.

There are no park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness areas, recreation / refuge lands, or ecologically critical areas within the Preferred Alternative project area. As such, these resources were not brought forward for analysis in the EA.

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

The Preferred Alternative would have no effects on the human environment that would be highly controversial.

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

The Preferred Alternative would have no effects on the human environment that would be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

(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.

This decision is not precedent setting. The issues considered in the EA were developed by the interdisciplinary team within the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions. Significant cumulative impacts are not anticipated.

(7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.

AMRP's fire suppression project is the only activity known or anticipated for the Seagull Mine site under the Preferred Alternative. At the Helco Mine in Rilda Canyon, coordination with PacifiCorp and Emery County, temporary drainage controls, and appropriate reclamation techniques and fire suppression efforts would result in minor cumulative impacts in the short term and a positive contribution to the cumulative impacts of any other activities which have occurred or are expected occur in the local area.

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

No historic properties exist within the project area. There would be no historic properties affected by the Preferred Alternative. No sites of tribal importance are known to exist within the Preferred Alternative project area.

(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 of 1973.

No threatened or endangered plant or animal species are known to exist within the Preferred Alternative project area. No critical habitat exists within the project area. Little to no impact to fish and wildlife resources is expected under the Preferred Alternative.

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

The Preferred Alternative would not violate any known federal, state, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. The Preferred Alternative is consistent with applicable plans, policies, and programs.

Mitigation Measures

Under the Preferred Alternative, AMRP would ensure the following mitigation measures are implemented:

- Washing construction equipment prior to entering and exiting the project to prevent the spread of noxious weeds; and
- A fire suppression plan to address wildfire in the event that coal mine fire extinguishing activity ignites the surrounding vegetation.

Statement of Environmental Significance

The Preferred Alternative would not have a significant impact on the human environment and an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. The Preferred Alternative is the only action alternative contemplated in the EA. Under the No Action Alternative, the coal refuse fires would continue to burn within the Manti-La Sal National Forest for an extended, undetermined length of time, increasing risks to public health and safety. Under the No Action Alternative, the ignition risk to surrounding vegetation would remain; smoke and combustion gas emissions would continue; and erosion potential would increase as coal turns to ash. The Preferred Alternative would have a moderately beneficial impact on the local human environment. OSMRE selects the Preferred Alternative for the Trail Mountain Coal Refuse Fires project.

Reviewed

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