

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
White River Field Office
73544 Hwy 64
Meeker, CO 81641

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NUMBER: CO-110-2004-079-EA

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER (optional): COC67627

PROJECT NAME: Re-route of County Road 3 at top of Cascade Gulch

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Sixth Principal Meridian, Colorado
T. 2 S., R. 95 W.,
Sec. 29, W½SW¼.

APPLICANT: Rio Blanco County Road & Bridge Dept.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:

Background/Introduction: Rio Blanco County has applied for a right-of-way in order to re-route a segment of County Road 3 at the top of Cascade Gulch.

Proposed Action: The proposed action is for the re-routing of a segment of County Road 3 at the top of Cascade Gulch in order to avoid causing damage to a 14" buried pipeline (Questar right-of-way COC048809). The road and pipeline are in the same spot and due to ExxonMobil's drilling plan, the possibility of damage to the pipeline from increased heavy truck traffic has presented a safety issue in use of the road in its present location. Therefore, in order to prevent the possibility of a rupture from heavy loads, the re-route will start where the old Cascade compressor station was and continue down the east side of the ridge top and the reconnect at a point past the problem area. The old segment of road will be reclaimed to its original contour with trees from the reworking of County Road 3 at the bottom of Cascade Gulch to the top, being placed in the old road bed to act as a deterrent to vehicle traffic. Rio Blanco County, ExxonMobil and the BLM are working together to provide a solution to an extremely narrow, steep, and crooked road in order to accommodate increased useage for drilling operations.

The action will be authorized under the authority of Title V of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of October 21, 1976.

No Action Alternative: The no action alternative would deny the application and the road would have to be used as is.

NEED FOR THE ACTION: To avoid causing damage to a 14” buried pipeline (Questar right-of-way COC048809).

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: White River Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (ROD/RMP).

Date Approved: July 1, 1997

Decision Number/Page: 2-49 thru 2-52

Decision Language: “To make public lands available for the siting of public and private facilities through the issuance of applicable land use authorizations, in a manner that provides for reasonable protection of other resource values”.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT / ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES / MITIGATION MEASURES:

STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LAND HEALTH: In January 1997, Colorado Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved the Standards for Public Land Health. These standards cover upland soils, riparian systems, plant and animal communities, threatened and endangered species, and water quality. Standards describe conditions needed to sustain public land health and relate to all uses of the public lands. Because a standard exists for these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis. These findings are located in specific elements listed below:

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

AIR QUALITY

Affected Environment: There are no special air quality designations or non-attainment areas in the vicinity of the proposed action.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action would result in short term, local impacts to air quality during and after construction, due to dust being blown into the air. However, airborne particulate matter should not exceed Colorado air quality standards on an hourly or daily basis.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: Impacts are not anticipated from the no-action alternative.

Mitigation: None.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment: The proposed road reroute has been inventoried at the Class III (100% pedestrian) level (O'Brien 2004, Compliance Dated 4/1/2004) with no new cultural resources identified during the inventory.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: It does not appear that any known cultural resources will be impacted by the proposed road reroute.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no new impacts to cultural resources under the No Action Alternative.

Mitigation: 1. The operator is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing historic or archaeological sites, or for collecting artifacts. If historic or archaeological materials are uncovered during any project or construction activities, the operator is to immediately stop activities in the immediate area of the find that might further disturb such materials, and immediately contact the authorized officer (AO). Within five working days the AO will inform the operator as to:

- whether the materials appear eligible for the National Register of Historic Places
- the mitigation measures the operator will likely have to undertake before the site can be used (assuming in situ preservation is not necessary)
- a timeframe for the AO to complete an expedited review under 36 CFR 800-11 to confirm, through the State Historic Preservation Officer, that the findings of the AO are correct and that mitigation is appropriate.

If the operator wishes, at any time, to relocate activities to avoid the expense of mitigation and/or the delays associated with this process, the AO will assume responsibility for whatever recordation and stabilization of the exposed materials may be required. Otherwise, the operator will be responsible for mitigation cost. The AO will provide technical and procedural guidelines for the conduct of mitigation. Upon verification from the AO that the required mitigation has been completed, the operator will then be allowed to resume construction.

2. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g) the holder of this authorization must notify the AO, by telephone, with written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary items, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony. Further, pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c) and (d), you must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the authorized officer.

INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES

Affected Environment: Noxious weeds known to occur at or near the site of the proposed action include houndstongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*) and mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) and spotted knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*). The invasive alien cheatgrass also occurs on disturbed, unvegetated areas associated with roadsides, pipelines and oil and gas locations.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action will create disturbance which if left unvegetated, could provide safe sites for the establishment of noxious and invasive species.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There will be no change from the present situation.

Mitigation: Promptly recontour and revegetate all disturbed areas with Native seed mixture # 3. The operator will be responsible for eradicating all noxious and invasive species that occur on site using materials and methods approved by the authorized officer.

MIGRATORY BIRDS

Affected Environment: The project area is composed of a narrow (250') mountain big sagebrush ridgeline in a mountain shrubland matrix (dominated by Utah serviceberry). The reroute is situated about 300' east of the original road/pipeline corridor along the lee side of the ridgeline.

The project area supports an assemblage of migratory birds that nest in these higher elevation sagebrush-serviceberry steppe from mid-May through mid-July. Members of these bird communities are typically well distributed and common across large expanses of suitable habitat; there are no rare or narrow endemics known to inhabit the general area. Birds identified as having higher conservation interests in these habitats include: Brewer's sparrow (sage), green-tailed towhee (sage and mountain shrub), and Virginia's warbler (mountain shrub). Although green-tailed towhees and Virginia's warbler are heavily represented in adjoining mountain and mixed shrub habitats, Brewer's sparrows are poorly represented in these small insular pockets of habitat.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: It is likely that road construction would coincide with the bird nesting season. It is expected that road construction activities at this time would disrupt ongoing nesting attempts within 100 feet either side of centerline. Discounting substrate currently within 100' of an existing roadbed, disturbance would extend to about 4.5 acres of sagebrush and mountain shrub habitat. Considering the fact that this is a linear project and more potential nesting territories could be intersected, it is possible that 1-3 pairs of nesting Brewer's sparrows and green-tailed towhee may be involved. It is unlikely that Virginia's warbler, which nests in heavier mountain shrub types, would be subject to levels of disturbance that would disrupt nesting efforts. These levels of impact are not considered substantive and do not warrant delaying project work.

Habitat conditions adversely affected by this action would be countered in the near future by shrub reestablishment on the rehabilitated roadbed. Although the extent of habitat influenced by

road activity would remain the same as current, shifting the road to the edge of the sagebrush park (rather than bisecting this park) would allow minor improvement in the continuity of habitat available for sagebrush associates in the future.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: Continued use of the existing corridor would have no further influence on wildlife habitats or populations, but an opportunity to reposition this traffic corridor off the ridge's centerline would be foregone.

Mitigation: None

THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE ANIMAL SPECIES (includes a finding on Standard 4)

Affected Environment: There are no special status species known to inhabit or derive important benefit from the project locale. Although a small population of greater sage-grouse occupy portions of Magnolia with more contiguous sagebrush cover, the small, isolated sagebrush ridgeline comprising the project area is about 3 miles from the nearest occupied habitat.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action would have no conceivable influence on special status animals.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: The current situation has no identifiable influence on special status species.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species: This project and its locale have no potential association with special status animals, therefore the public land health standard for special status species is not applicable to this action.

THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE PLANT SPECIES (includes a finding on Standard 4)

Affected Environment: There are no threatened, endangered or sensitive plant species occurring within the project area.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: None

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: None

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species: There is no reasonable likelihood that the proposed action or no action alternative would have an influence

on the condition or function of Threatened, Endangered, or Sensitive plant species. Thus, there would be no effect on achieving the land health standard.

WASTES, HAZARDOUS OR SOLID

Affected Environment: There are no known hazardous or other solid wastes on the subject lands. No hazardous materials are known to have been used, stored or disposed of at this site.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: No listed or extremely hazardous materials in excess of threshold quantities are proposed for use in this project. While commercial preparations of fuels and lubricants proposed for use may contain some hazardous constituents, they would be stored, used and transported in a manner consistent with applicable laws, and the generation of hazardous wastes would not be anticipated.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: No hazardous or other solid wastes would be generated under the no action alternative.

Mitigation: The operator shall be required to collect and properly dispose of any solid wastes generated by this project.

WETLANDS AND RIPARIAN ZONES (includes a finding on Standard 2)

Affected Environment: The nearest riparian communities are associated with Piceance Creek, about 3 miles downstream of the project site via ephemeral channels. The nearest riparian communities managed by the BLM are over 20 miles downstream of the project site.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Because of physical separation and application of standard erosion management practices during construction, it is inconceivable that this project would have any measurable short or long term influence on sediment yields to Piceance Creek.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There has been no water quality impacts to Piceance Creek associated with the existing roadbed. Emergency excavation and pipeline repair attributable to traffic-related pipeline damage could involve far greater risks of short-term downstream sediment discharges.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for riparian systems: This project would have no potential to measurably influence aquatic communities in Piceance Creek; therefore project implementation would have no influence on meeting public land health standards applicable to riparian vegetation or channel function.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS NOT PRESENT OR NOT AFFECTED:

No ACEC’s, flood plains, prime and unique farmlands, Wilderness Study Areas, or Wild and Scenic Rivers exist within the area affected by the proposed action. Impacts water quality are not anticipated; currently water quality meets the Land Health Standards and would continue to meet the standard as a result of the proposed action. There are also no Native American religious or environmental justice concerns associated with the proposed action.

NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS

The following elements **must** be addressed due to the involvement of Standards for Public Land Health:

SOILS (includes a finding on Standard 1)

Affected Environment: Baseline soils data have been collected for Rio Blanco County by the NRCS and are published in an order III Soil Survey. This survey is available for review from the White River Field Office. The table below identifies soil characteristics for the soils encountered from the proposed action.

Soil Number	Soil Name	Soil pH	Permeability	Water Capacity	RunOff	Erosion Potential	Range site	Slope
43	Irigul-Parachute complex	7.4-7.8	0.6-2.0	0.09-0.11	Rapid	Slight to high	Loamy Slopes/Mountain Loam	12-45% 5-30%
58	Parachute Loam	6.6-7.8	0.6-2.0	0.16-0.18	Medium	Very high	Brushy Loam	25-75%

Revegetation limitations for these soil types include an arid climate and droughty soil condition. None of these well locations are located on soils delineated as being fragile on slopes greater than 35 percent.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Impacts associated with road development include but are not limited to, loss of topsoil, soil compaction and possible increase in sediment to local waterways. The primary surface-disturbing impact would be a potential increase in sediment transport from runoff events after the protective vegetative cover has been removed.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: None

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for upland soils: The soils associated with the proposed action are and will continue to be within the criteria of standard 1 for Public Land Health Standards.

VEGETATION (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: The existing vegetation in the project area is mixed mountain big sagebrush and Utah serviceberry with a diverse understory of grasses and forbs

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action will create earthen disturbance, which if it is not properly revegetated, could provide safe sites for noxious and invasive species which, upon their spread into adjacent native plant communities, could negatively impact those communities over the long term.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There will be no new disturbance on site.

Mitigation: Promptly recontour and revegetate all disturbed areas including any cut and fill slopes with native seed mix #3. Eradicate all noxious and invasive species on site using materials and methods approved by the Authorized officer.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Wildlife, Aquatic and Wildlife, Terrestrial): If the proposed action is implemented with the prescribed mitigation, upland plant communities in the project area will continue to meet the standard.

WILDLIFE, AQUATIC (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: Aquatic habitats associated with Piceance Creek lie about 3 miles downstream of the project site via ephemeral channels. Although Piceance Creek occasionally supports trout escaped from stocked ponds along the valley, because these upstream channel reaches are heavily influenced by irrigation practices during the spring through fall months, the stream is generally incapable of supporting a viable fisheries. The nearest aquatic habitats managed by the BLM are over 20 miles downstream of the project site.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Because of physical separation and application of standard erosion management practices during construction, it is unlikely that this project would have any measurable short or long term influence on sediment yields to Piceance Creek.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There have been no water quality impacts to Piceance Creek associated with the existing roadbed. Emergency excavation and pipeline repair attributable to traffic-related pipeline damage could involve far greater risks of short-term downstream sediment discharges.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Terrestrial): This project would have no potential to measurably influence aquatic communities in Piceance Creek, therefore project implementation would have no influence on public land health standards applicable to aquatic animal communities.

WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: These higher elevation mountain shrub associations are used during the fall and earlier winter months by deer and elk; these ranges are classified by the Colorado Division of Wildlife as general winter range.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Project work would be accomplished outside the period of big game occupation. As a source of disturbance and in the context of road density, there would be no net effect of shifting the road 300 feet east and rehabilitating the previous corridor.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no further affect on local big game habitats since current situation would be maintained.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Aquatic): The Public Land Health Standard for animal communities is widely met in the project vicinity. Although road construction generally depresses habitat utility, an equal length of existing parallel road would be rehabilitated. Shifting the road to a lower position on the ridgeline would also tend to reduce the extent of habitat that is visually line-of-sight of the road, which would slightly reduce the extent of habitat indirectly influenced by traffic (big game avoidance). This action would have no net influence on the public land health standard for animal communities.

OTHER NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS: For the following elements, those brought forward for analysis will be formatted as shown above.

Non-Critical Element	NA or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
Access and Transportation		X	
Cadastral Survey	X		
Fire Management	X		
Forest Management	X		
Geology and Minerals	X		
Hydrology/Water Rights	X		
Law Enforcement		X	

Non-Critical Element	NA or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
Paleontology			X
Rangeland Management		X	
Realty Authorizations		X	
Recreation		X	
Socio-Economics		X	
Visual Resources			X
Wild Horses	X		

PALEONTOLOGY

Affected Environment: The proposed action is located in an area mapped as the Uinta Formation (Tweto 1979) which the BLM has classified as a Category I formation meaning it is known to produce scientifically important fossil resources.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Should it become necessary to excavate into the underlying bedrock formation then there is the possibility to impact important fossil resources.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no new impacts to fossil resources under the No Action Alternative.

Mitigation: All exposed bedrock outcrops in the proposed reroute area must be examined by an approved paleontologist and a report detailing the results of the examination with recommendations for mitigation any impacts to any fossils that might be present prior to the initiation of construction.

If at any time it becomes necessary to excavate into the underlying bedrock formation at any time a paleontological monitor shall be present during such excavation.

VISUAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment: These wells are in an area managed as Visual Resource Management Area (VRM) Class 3. The objective of this class is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to characteristic landscape should be moderate. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

This project is adjacent to the existing Rio Blanco County road.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The visual effects from this project will result in a moderate change to the characteristic landscape. VRM Class 3 objectives will be met.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: None

Mitigation: None

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY: No cumulative impacts were identified. Cumulative impacts from oil and gas development were analyzed in the White River Resource Area Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (PRMP/FEIS) completed in June 1996. Current development, including the proposed action, has not exceeded the cumulative impacts from the foreseeable development analyzed in the PRMP/FEIS.

O'Brien, Patrick

1003 Cultural Resource Inventory for a Proposed Reroute of County Road 3, Rio Blanco County, Colorado. Metcalf Archaeological Consultants, Inc. Eagle, Colorado.

Tweto, Ogden, Compiler

1979 Geology Map of Colorado. United States Geologic Survey, Department of Interior, Reston Virginia.

**PERSONS / AGENCIES CONSULTED:
INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:**

Name	Title	Area of Responsibility
Caroline Hollowed	Hydrologist	Air Quality
Tamara Meagley	NRS	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
Tamara Meagley	NRS	Threatened and Endangered Plant Species
Michael Selle	Archaeologist	Cultural Resources Paleontological Resources
Mark Hafkenschiel	Rangeland Management Specialist	Invasive, Non-Native Species
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Migratory Birds
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Animal Species, Wildlife
Marty O'Mara	Hazmat Collateral	Wastes, Hazardous or Solid
Caroline Hollowed	Hydrologist	Water Quality, Surface and Ground Hydrology and Water Rights
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Wetlands and Riparian Zones
Chris Ham	ORP	Wilderness
Caroline Hollowed	Hydrologist	Soils
Mark Hafkenschiel	Rangeland Management Specialist	Vegetation
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Wildlife Terrestrial and Aquatic
Chris Ham	ORP	Access and Transportation

Name	Title	Area of Responsibility
Ken Holsinger	Natural Resource Specialist	Fire Management
Bob Fowler	Forester	Forest Management
Paul Daggett	Mining Engineer	Geology and Minerals
Mark Hafkenschiel	Rangeland Management Specialist	Rangeland Management
Penny Brown	Realty Specialist	Realty Authorizations
Chris Ham	ORP	Recreation
Max McCoy	NRS	Visual Resources

Finding of No Significant Impact/Decision Record (FONSI/DR)

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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)/RATIONALE: The environmental assessment and analyzing the environmental effects of the proposed action have been reviewed. The approved mitigation measures (listed below) result in a Finding of No Significant Impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the proposed action.

DECISION/RATIONALE: It is my decision to approve the proposed action with the mitigation measures listed below.

MITIGATION MEASURES:

1. The operator is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing historic or archaeological sites, or for collecting artifacts. If historic or archaeological materials are uncovered during any project or construction activities, the operator is to immediately stop activities in the immediate area of the find that might further disturb such materials, and immediately contact the authorized officer (AO). Within five working days the AO will inform the operator as to:

- whether the materials appear eligible for the National Register of Historic Places
- the mitigation measures the operator will likely have to undertake before the site can be used (assuming in situ preservation is not necessary)
- a timeframe for the AO to complete an expedited review under 36 CFR 800-11 to confirm, through the State Historic Preservation Officer, that the findings of the AO are correct and that mitigation is appropriate.

If the operator wishes, at any time, to relocate activities to avoid the expense of mitigation and/or the delays associated with this process, the AO will assume responsibility for whatever recordation and stabilization of the exposed materials may be required. Otherwise, the operator will be responsible for mitigation cost. The AO will provide technical and procedural guidelines for the conduct of mitigation. Upon verification from the AO that the required mitigation has been completed, the operator will then be allowed to resume construction.

2. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g) the holder of this authorization must notify the AO, by telephone, with written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary items, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony. Further, pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c) and (d), you must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the authorized officer.

3. Promptly recontour and revegetate all disturbed areas with Native seed mixture #3 from the White River ROD/RMP.

4. The operator will be responsible for eradicating all noxious and invasive species that occur on site using materials and methods approved by the authorized officer.

Seed Mix	Species (Variety)	Lbs. PLS per Acre	Range Sites
3	Western wheatgrass (Rosanna)	2	Gravelly 10"-14", Pinyon/Juniper Woodland, Stony Foothills, 147 (Mountain Mahogany)
	Bluebunch wheatgrass (Secar)	2	
	Thickspike wheatgrass (Critana)	2	
	Indian ricegrass (Nezpar)	1	
	Fourwing saltbush (Wytana)	1	
	Utah sweetvetch	1	
	Alternates: Needle and thread, globemallow		

5. The operator shall be required to collect and properly dispose of any solid wastes generated by this project.

6. All exposed bedrock outcrops in the proposed reroute area must be examined by an approved paleontologist and a report detailing the results of the examination with recommendations for mitigation any impacts to any fossils that might be present prior to the initiation of construction. If at any time it becomes necessary to excavate into the underlying bedrock formation at any time, a paleontological monitor shall be present during such excavation.

COMPLIANCE/MONITORING: Compliance will be conducted by the realty staff every five years.

NAME OF PREPARER: *Penny Brown*

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: *Caroline P. Hallowell 5/2/04*

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: *Deann Rhall*
Acting Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: *5/21/04*

ATTACHMENTS: Map of the Location of the Proposed Action.

Location of Proposed Action CO-110-2004-079-EA

