

**MAINTENANCE AND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT  
ALONG EXISTING WESTERN AREA POWER  
ADMINISTRATION TRANSMISSION LINE RIGHTS-OF-  
WAY ON NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM LANDS,  
COLORADO, UTAH, AND NEBRASKA**

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT  
FINAL SCOPING SUMMARY REPORT  
(DOE/EIS-0442)**

July 2010





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## **ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
DOE	U.S. Department of Energy
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NOI	Notice of Intent
ROW	Rights-of-way
Forest Service	U.S. Forest Service
Western	Western Area Power Administration

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## **1.0 Introduction**

On April 8, 2010, the Western Area Power Administration (Western) and the U.S. Forest Service (Forest Service) issued a Notice of Intent (NOI) (75 *Federal Register* 17913) to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for Maintenance and Vegetation Management Along Existing Western Area Power Administration Transmission Line Rights-of-Way on National Forest System Lands, Colorado, Utah, and Nebraska (Western Area Power Administration Transmission Line Management Reauthorization Project). The EIS will address the Western proposal to alter its vegetation management practices in forested areas to facilitate compliance with new electrical utility regulations and standards designed to increase transmission system reliability, reduce infrastructure damage, and protect public health and welfare; and address other routine maintenance activities along the rights-of-way (ROWs).

Implementing the proposal would include modifying existing Forest Service authorizations or issuing new authorizations to accommodate Western's vegetation management proposal and maintenance of the electrical transmission facilities. Western and the Forest Service are joint lead agencies in the preparation of the EIS in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), 42 United States Code 4321 *et seq.*, U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) NEPA implementing procedures (10 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR], Part 21), and Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA implementing regulations (40 CFR 1500 – 1508). The EIS will address the environmental effects associated with the way Western manages vegetation along its ROWs on National Forest System lands in Colorado, Utah, and Nebraska.

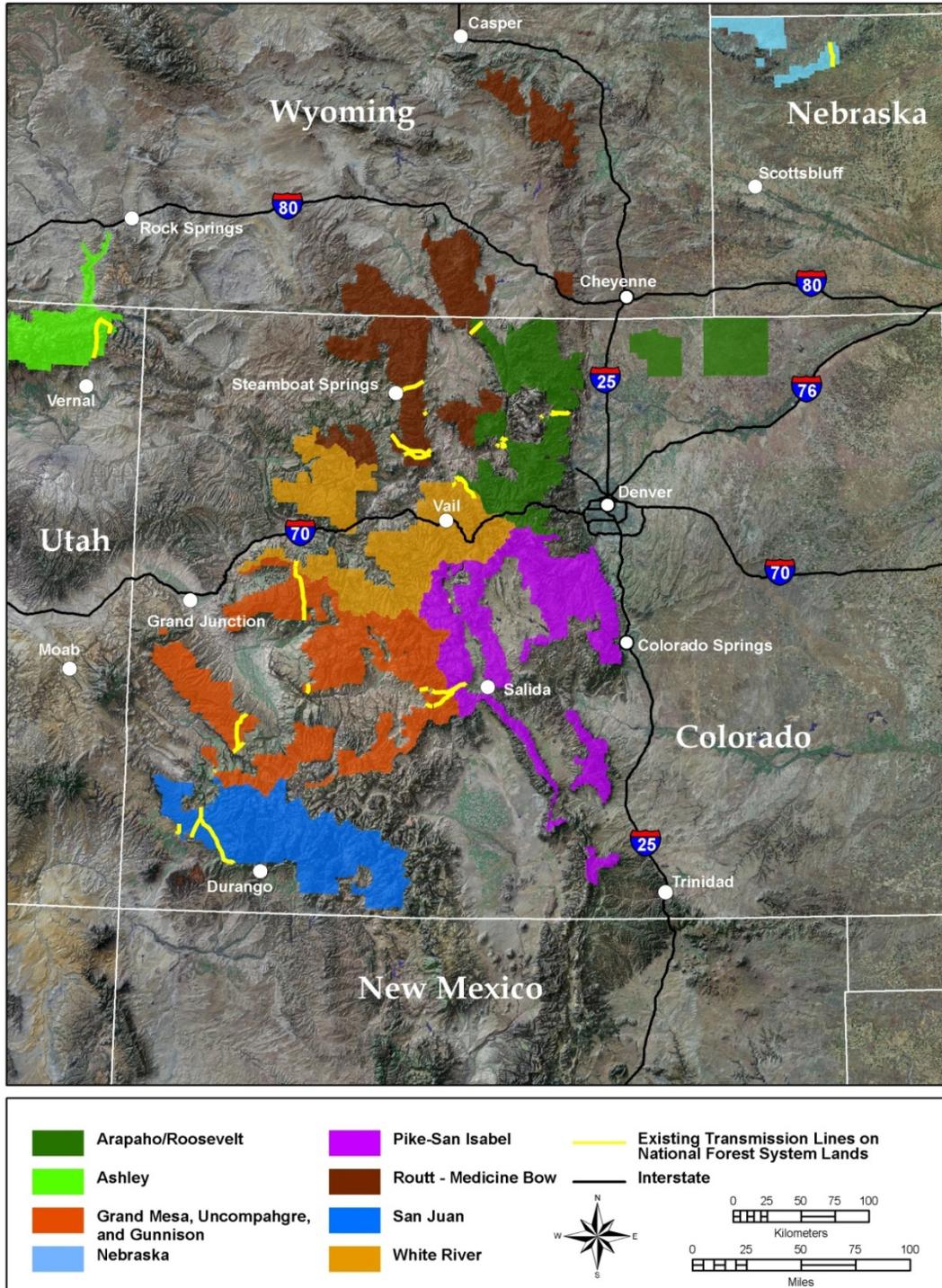
The Western need for action is to ensure that it can safely and reliably operate and maintain its existing electrical transmission facilities. Western must meet North American Electric Reliability Corporation mandatory vegetation management and maintenance standards (FAC-003-1) in accordance with section 1211 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 and industry standards. These industry standards are designed to ensure safe and reliable operation of the transmission line system.

This report documents the public scoping process performed as part of the NEPA process for the Western Area Power Administration Transmission Line Management Reauthorization Project.

### **1.1 Project Description**

Western proposes to improve the way it manages vegetation along its ROWs on National Forest System lands in Colorado, Utah, and Nebraska (Figure 1). National Forests in Colorado in which Western maintains transmission lines include Arapaho-Roosevelt, Grand Mesa-Uncompahgre-Gunnison, White River, Routt, San Juan, and Pike-San Isabel. The project also includes the Nebraska National Forest in Nebraska and the Ashley National Forest in Utah. Western maintains approximately 300 miles of ROWs in these National Forests.

**Figure 1.** Project Area for the Western Area Power Administration Transmission Line Reauthorization Project



Not all areas of the Western ROWs would require the proposed changes to vegetation management. Vegetation management approaches would vary along ROWs depending on site conditions, identified risks to the transmission lines, and other factors. Over the life of its facilities, Western would implement proposed vegetation management changes in locations along its ROWs where vegetation could interfere with Western's ability to reliably operate and maintain the facilities. In general, Western proposes to change its vegetation management practices in the following ways:

- Establish and then maintain vegetation conditions along ROWs that reduce risk to the transmission lines from vegetation-caused interference with the maintenance and operation of transmission lines. This could include establishing relatively stable native vegetation that, at mature height, would not grow into conductors, fall onto conductors or structures, or contribute to high fuel loads.
- Change from a largely reactive approach of cutting danger trees during annual ROW reentry cycles to a proactive approach that incorporates integrated vegetation management. The objectives would be to control vegetation that, at mature height, presents a risk to transmission line maintenance and operation, and allows for longer ROW reentry intervals.
- Reduce as necessary and manage the amount of fuel loading on ROWs to reduce the risk of transmission line-caused wildfires and to reduce the potential impacts of wildfires to transmission lines and structures.

## **1.2 Scoping**

CEQ NEPA implementing regulations at 40 CFR 1501.7 require an early and open “scoping” process as part of preparing an EIS. Scoping is the process by which lead agencies solicit input from the public and interested agencies on the nature and extent of the actions, alternatives, and impacts to be addressed in the EIS and the methods by which they will be evaluated. To help lead agencies in their scoping efforts, the CEQ issued an advisory memorandum in April 1981, *Council on Environmental Quality, Scoping Guidance: Memorandum for General Counsels, NEPA Liaisons and Participants in Scoping*, which explains how to conduct an effective scoping process.

The scoping process begins with publication in the *Federal Register* of an NOI to prepare an EIS. Section 2.0 of this report describes the scoping process for this project.

## **1.3 Purpose of the Scoping Summary Report**

The purpose of this scoping summary report is to explain the scoping process and to describe the tools Western and the Forest Service used to provide information to the public about the project and solicit comments on the scope and content of the EIS. Information reviewed in preparation of this report included comments submitted at the public scoping meetings, and comments submitted via U.S. mail, email, or electronically on the project website during the scoping period. Section 3.0 of this report summarizes the comments Western and the Forest Service received during the scoping period.

## **2.0 Scoping Process**

The scoping process began with publication of the NOI on April 8, 2010, and ended on May 26, 2010, a period of 48 days. The NOI invited public participation in the EIS scoping process and solicited public comments on the scope and content of the EIS. Appendix A includes a copy of the NOI. Scoping activities included publication of the NOI, direct mail notifications, press releases and advertisements, and public scoping meetings, as described below.

### **2.1 Notification**

Western and the Forest Service compiled a list of interested individuals, organizations, interest groups, and agencies to be notified of scoping. The agencies generated the notification list from previous public involvement efforts that included local, state, and federal agencies, and non-governmental organizations, individuals, news media, and businesses. Personnel from each of the eight National Forests in the project area contributed to the list. Appendix B includes the notification list. This list will be updated throughout project development.

Western distributed a total of 962 postcards and emails on April 2, 2010. The postcard and email provided information about the project and the times, dates, and locations of the scoping meetings, the date the scoping period closed, and contact information. The postcard and email also provided the project email and website addresses. Appendix A includes copies of the postcard and email.

To provide notice of the public scoping meetings, Western distributed a news release on April 21, 2010, to the 17 newspapers and 10 radio stations listed in Table 1. The press release included times, dates, and locations of the public meetings, provided information about the project, invited public comment, provided contact information, provided the date scoping comments were due, and provided a link to the project website. Appendix A includes a copy of the content of the news release.

Western published advertisements in local newspapers before the dates of the scoping meetings. Table 2 lists the local newspapers that published the advertisements. Appendix A includes copies of the advertisements.

Western created a project website to provide project-related information to the public. Western will update the website throughout EIS development. Information posted on the website during the scoping period included the dates, times, and locations of the public scoping meetings; an invitation to comment on the project, including how to submit comments, an online comment form, and notice of when the scoping period would close; contact information for Western and the Forest Service; background information on the project; draft design features with an explanation of what design features are and how they are used; a project description; maps depicting the transmission line ROWs in each National Forest included in the project area; a scoping meeting brochure; and the three-panel display boards prepared for the public scoping meetings. The website can be accessed at <http://www.wapa.gov/transmission/Western-FS-EIS.htm>.

**Table 1. News Release Distribution**

Media	Location
<b>Newspapers</b>	
<i>Summit Daily News</i>	Breckenridge, Colorado
<i>Delta County Independent</i>	Delta, Colorado
<i>Denver Post</i>	Denver, Colorado
<i>Durango Herald</i>	Durango, Colorado
<i>The Coloradoan</i>	Fort Collins, Colorado
<i>Sky-Hi News</i>	Granby, Colorado
<i>Grand Junction Daily Sentinel</i>	Grand Junction, Colorado
<i>Gunnison Country Times</i>	Gunnison, Colorado
<i>Montrose Daily Press</i>	Montrose, Colorado
<i>Leadville Chronicle</i>	Leadville, Colorado
<i>Chaffee County Times</i>	Salida, Colorado
<i>Steamboat Pilot</i>	Steamboat Springs, Colorado
<i>High Country News</i>	Paonia, Colorado
<i>Chadron Record</i>	Chadron, Nebraska
<i>Salt Lake Tribune</i>	Salt Lake City, Utah
<i>Deseret News</i>	Salt Lake City, Utah
<i>Vernal Express</i>	Vernal, Utah
<b>Radio Stations</b>	
KRAI	Craig, Colorado
55 Country	Craig, Colorado
96.9 FM KBCR	Steamboat Springs, Colorado
High Country Radio Network	Steamboat Springs, Colorado
610 AM KCSR	Chadron, Nebraska
98.5 FM KIFX	Roosevelt, Utah
1250 AM KNEU	Roosevelt, Utah
102.7 FM KSL	Salt Lake City, Utah
94.3 FM KXRQ	Vernal, Utah
105.5 FM KLCY	Vernal, Utah

**Table 2. Advertisement Publication**

Newspaper	Location	Date of Publication
<i>Denver Post</i>	Denver, Colorado	April 21, 2010
<i>Grand Junction Daily Sentinel</i>	Grand Junction, Colorado	April 21, 2010
<i>Vernal Express</i>	Vernal, Utah	April 21, 2010
<i>Salt Lake Tribune and Deseret News</i>	Salt Lake City, Utah	April 23, 2010

Western notified more than 115 federal, state, and local agencies of scoping, including the following:

- Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service-Wildlife Services
- Colorado Department of Natural Resources
- Colorado Department of Transportation
- Colorado Division of Wildlife
- Colorado Division of Water Resources
- Colorado Natural Areas Program
- Colorado Natural Heritage Program
- Colorado State Historic Preservation Office
- Colorado State Forest Service
- County Commissioners, planning departments, and other county agencies in Colorado, Nebraska, and Utah
- National Park Service
- Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality
- Nebraska State Forest Service
- Upper Niobrara White Natural Resources District
- Officials of cities and towns located in the vicinity of the project area in Colorado, Nebraska, and Utah
- Utah Department of Natural Resources
- Utah Department of Transportation
- Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
- Utah Division of Water Rights
- Utah State Historic Preservation Office
- Utah State Parks and Recreation
- Utah Trust Lands Administration
- U.S. Air Force
- U.S. Army
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs
- U.S. Bureau of Land Management
- U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Geological Survey
- U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service

See Appendix B for the complete list of agencies notified.

Western is the lead agency for Tribal Consultation and for compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and other cultural resource protection regulations. Western sent a letter dated March 26, 2010, to 44 Native American Tribes, initiating government-to-government consultation. The letter invited tribes to participate in project review and consultation under NHPA and NEPA. Western also requested any information tribes might have on special ethnographic or archaeological resources in or near the proposed project area.

## **2.2 Scoping Meetings**

Western and the Forest Service held three public scoping meetings during April 2010. Table 3 lists meeting dates, facilities, and locations.

The scoping meetings were in an open house format from 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. to facilitate public attendance at each location. Western and the Forest Service also held agency scoping meetings at each location on the same dates from 1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.

**Table 3. Scoping Meeting Locations**

Date of Meeting	Facility	Location
Thursday, April 22, 2010	Ramada Plaza Denver North	10 East 120 <sup>th</sup> Avenue, Denver, Colorado
Friday, April 23, 2010	Museum of Western Colorado, Whitman Education Center	248 South 4 <sup>th</sup> , Grand Junction, Colorado
Monday, April 26, 2010	Uintah Basin Applied Technology College	450 North 2000 West, Vernal, Utah

At the scoping meetings, Western and the Forest Service representatives were available to respond to public comments and questions. Representatives included the Western and Forest Service project managers, and a Western special programs manager. The project manager, public involvement specialist, and project assistants from ICF International, the contractor assisting Western with EIS preparation, also attended and assisted with meeting logistics.

Scoping materials on display at the meetings included large-format three-panel display boards, maps of each National Forest in the project area, and a brochure. The display boards provided information about NEPA, the scoping process, and making effective comments; described the project, its objectives, timeline, and its proposed design features; and provided a map of the project area. Eight maps displayed the locations of ROW transmission line segments in each National Forest in the project area. The brochure provided information about the project, NEPA, design features, and the project timeline. Comment cards were provided in a designated area where participants could sit down and fill them out. In addition, a computer was available for public use to submit comments. Sign-in cards recorded attendance at the meetings. Appendix A includes copies of all scoping materials.

## 2.3 Scoping Meeting Attendance

Seventeen individuals signed in at the scoping meetings that were affiliated with the agencies, businesses, and organizations listed below.

- Colorado Division of Wildlife
- Colorado Wild
- Grand County Department of Natural Resources
- Holy Cross Energy
- Mid-West Electric Consumers
- Pull Ink 360
- Tri State Generation and Transmission Association, Inc.
- Uintah County Public Lands
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Wasatch County
- Western Slope ATV Association
- Xcel Energy

Additional attendees included personnel from Western, the Forest Service Rocky Mountain Region, and National Forests in the project area.

## 3.0 Public Comments

Western received a total of 13 letters and emails during the scoping period of April 8, 2010, through May 26, 2010. Of the 13 letters and emails, seven provided comments on the project. The other communications received included one letter expressing support for the project, two requests to be added to the project mailing list, and one request to be removed from the mailing list because the email address was no longer active. Western received one request from the Colorado Division of Wildlife asking for Geographic Information System information and a request from the Bureau of Land Management in Utah to review administrative drafts of the alternatives and the EIS and be added to the mailing list. Appendix D includes copies of the letters and emails received during scoping.

The seven comment documents that provided comments included one letter and one comment card submitted at the scoping meetings, one online comment posted on the project website, and four comment letters submitted by email to the project email address at: [Western-FS-EIS@wapa.gov](mailto:Western-FS-EIS@wapa.gov).

Two individuals, three non-governmental organizations, one federal agency, and one county agency submitted comments during the scoping period. Agencies and organizations were as follows:

- Colorado Wild
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Wasatch County Commissioners
- Western Slope ATV Association
- Quiet Use Coalition

Western used a multi-step process to identify and summarize the concerns expressed in each comment into broader issue topics, as follows:

- Assigned each comment document a unique identifier (referred to as a document number) and used that number for tracking and to ensure the identification of issues and comments.
- Electronically scanned the comment documents and reviewed them to identify individual comments.
- Entered comment-document excerpts into a spreadsheet and assigned each comment to an issue topic based on the substance of the comment.
- Throughout the process, Western divided or condensed topics and moved comments between topics to best reflect the substance of each comment. Issue topics are broad resource categories used to consolidate comments expressing similar areas of concern (see the Public Comments Section). Appendix C contains a list of the issues and comments from each letter, organized by topic.
- Finally, Western summarized the comments by topic to provide an overview of the issues raised during scoping.

This scoping comment summary report does not include comments expressing general support for the proposed project, requests for information, or other comments that do not relate to the scope of the EIS.

Western organized issues and comments by topic as presented below, and will consider these during EIS preparation.

## **Access and Transportation**

- Employ effective closure techniques to prevent unauthorized public use of maintenance and ROW access routes, including side spur routes that branch off designated roads or around gates to minimize impacts to resources from such use.
  - Use gates and signs to clearly identify routes closed to the public.
  - Close the unauthorized route around the gate on National Forest System Road 225.B on the Salida District, and sign or gate transmission line ROW access off National Forest System Road 225.A.
  - Consider regular law enforcement patrols, in particular during big game rifle hunting season, to prevent violations.
- Revegetate and recontour abandoned access routes in transmission line ROWs and routes where treatment has been completed and will not be required for many years.
- Ensure permit holders and authorized agents use designated routes and gates.
- Maintain access routes to Forest Service management specifications.
- Design, construct, and maintain access routes to the minimum standard necessary to accommodate vegetation treatment, repair and maintenance, and the frequency of required access.
- Determine if an approved Travel Management Plan designates the existing routes the public is using in transmission line ROWs are for public use or for administrative use.
- Maintain access to all water-related facilities such as dams, reservoirs, delivery systems, monitoring facilities, communications sites, and power-line corridors.

## **Alternatives**

- Describe what the current Forest Service authorization for Western's use of National Forest lands allows and requires, including how this would change under the proposed project and any alternatives to it.
- Minimize the width of vegetation treatment corridors to be as narrow as possible consistent with safety and reliability of the transmission lines.
- Be as specific as possible regarding the treatment that would be implemented under each alternative and under what circumstances in which specific areas. Develop design criteria that specify tree-removal widths.
- Design and discuss methods for slash disposal that would minimize resource impacts and threats while sufficiently reducing slash at a reasonable cost. Discuss the benefits and detriments of the slash disposal or reduction methods and combinations of methods. Design criteria should state which methods will be used in which areas or situations, and in what proportions. Monitor areas where slash was treated to assess impacts, including any weed introduction and spread, and to modify future treatments as needed.

## **Climate Change**

- Minimize the effects of global warming.

## **Floodplains, Wetlands, and Water Resources**

- Comply with Clean Water Act Section 404 and Forest Service Watershed Conservation Practices Handbook 2509.25.
- Design treatment activities near wetland and riparian areas to avoid or mitigate damage to soils, water quality, and nontarget vegetation.
- Prohibit use of heavy equipment in riparian, wetland, and floodplain areas. Instead, use hand-felling techniques to cut trees and then treat in place or skid the material out, whichever will result in minimal damage. The exception would be if the fisheries biologist believes woody debris would create, maintain, or enhance fish habitat, in which case some tree bole sections could be retained in the water influence area or stream itself.
- Manage watersheds to allow for multiple use, to preserve the quality and quantity of water, to preserve environmental values, and to support existing and futures uses.

## **Health and Safety**

- Concern for the effects of herbicides on human health.

## **Land Use**

- Comply with requirements of the General Management Plans for each National Forest in the project area.

## **Process and Public Involvement**

- Concern that public meetings are during hours when the public is at work and therefore have no voice during the public process.
- Disclose if the proposed project relates to or overlaps the Emergency Powerline Clearing Project in the Arapaho-Roosevelt, White River, and Routt National Forests.

## **Recreation**

- Remove cut trees in the transmission line ROW in the Hightower Area of Grand Mesa to prevent blocking existing all-terrain-vehicle routes and creation of unauthorized all-terrain-vehicle routes.
- Manage off-highway vehicle use responsibly and uniformly across jurisdictional boundaries. Apply laws related to off-highway vehicles uniformly across jurisdictional boundaries.

## **Roadless Areas**

- Protect roadless area characteristics in compliance with the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (36 CFR 294.11). Minimize new road construction, consider non-road construction alternatives, prohibit slash piling, and eradicate weeds.

## **Social and Economic Values**

- Promote opportunities for harvesting merchantable forest products in accordance with the National Healthy Forest Initiative (Public Law 108-148).

## **Soils**

- Design, install, and maintain erosion control structures and culverts on access routes.
- Use water diversion structures and revegetate with grasses and other plants to prevent soil instability and erosion on high-altitude slopes. Establish native vegetation as soon as possible after treatment, and use sterile, annual, non-native plant species while native species become established on sites difficult to revegetate. Monitor revegetation sites to assess the progress of vegetation reestablishment.
- Apply effective practices to maintain vegetative cover to prevent soil erosion and protect resources.
- Recognize the Natural Resources Conservation Service soil survey as the authority in soil conservation matters.

## **Special Status and Sensitive Species**

- Limit the removal of mature trees and other vegetation that adversely alters habitat of sensitive species that rely on a continuous forest canopy, including, but not limited to, Canada lynx, American marten, northern goshawk, boreal owl, golden-crowned kinglet, olive-sided flycatcher, and red crossbill.
- Work with Forest Service biologists to minimize adverse impacts to Canada lynx habitat for all proposed treatment. Maintain and protect landscape linkages to ensure connectivity of lynx habitat.
- Perform botany surveys in all areas proposed for treatment to identify any plants listed as threatened, endangered, or candidate for Endangered Species Act listing; Forest Service sensitive species or species otherwise known to be rare, including those identified by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program. Mark plant populations to be avoided and provide buffer areas to allow plants to propagate.
- Comply with procedures specified in Forest Service Manual 2672.42 and 2672.43 for sensitive plant and wildlife species.

## **Vegetation**

- Concern for effects on vegetation.
- Concern for overuse of prescribed burning and herbicides.
- Identify areas in need of immediate treatment and areas that are of a lower priority. Discuss the treatments proposed in each area.
- Perform surveys to identify noxious weeds before treatment and eradicate noxious weeds to the extent practicable. After treatment, perform surveys for noxious weeds and eradication for two full growing seasons. To prevent the spread of noxious weeds, require vehicle washing before entering National Forest lands each day.

## **Visual Resources**

- Minimize the width of vegetation treatment corridors to be as narrow as possible and transition cutting intensity to minimize visual impacts by “feathering” the edges where trees are cleared.
- Comply with Forest Service management plan standards and guidelines regarding visual resources.

## **Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat**

- To maintain and facilitate wildlife habitat connectivity across transmission line ROWs, leave areas with cover vegetation to provide migration corridors for forest-dwelling species. Work with Forest Service biologists to identify appropriate areas.
- Concern for effects of herbicide on wildlife and general impacts of vegetation treatment on wildlife habitat.