FISHLAKE NATIONAL FOREST
BEAVER RANGER DISTRICT

BIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

for

THREATENED, ENDANGERED or CANDIDATE WILDLIFE SPECIES

for the

Big Flat Vegetation Management Project

Prepared By: __________ /s/ Steve Flinders ____________ Date: ___Sept 25, 2015____
Zone Wildlife Biologist
I. INTRODUCTION

The Big Flat Project is located approximately 12 miles east of Beaver, Utah, along state highway 153, from Merchant Valley to Big Flat itself (Figure 1). The project area is approximately 18,500 acres in size and includes about 2,900 acres of private land, most of which is associated with the Eagle Point Resort. The elevation ranges from 8,300 to 11,500 feet. The project area is located within the headwaters of four watersheds of the Fishlake National Forest. The 6th HUC watersheds are the Merchant Creek, East Fork Iant Creek-Beaver River, City Creek, and Three Creeks (see Table 1). Parts of two inventoried roadless areas (IRA)—City Creek and Bullion-Delano—are located within the project area, though forest management is not proposed within the IRAs at this time. The project area includes all or parts of T.28S, R.4W, Sections 19, 29, 30, 31, and 32; T.28S, R.5W, Sections 24, 25, 26, 27, 34, 35, and 36; T.29S, R.4W, Sections 5, 6, 7, 8, 17, 18, 19, 20, 30, and 31; and T.29S, R.5W, Sections 1, 2, 3, 8-17, 20-28, 35, and 36 of the Salt Lake Base Meridian.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Watershed</th>
<th>Size of Watershed</th>
<th>Portion of Watershed w/in Big Flat Project (Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Merchant Creek</td>
<td>11,867</td>
<td>3,216 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Fork Iant Creek-Beaver River</td>
<td>26,704</td>
<td>1,193 (less than 1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Creek</td>
<td>15,956</td>
<td>1,540 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Creeks</td>
<td>12,553</td>
<td>12,553 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>67,080</strong></td>
<td><strong>18,502</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following brief paragraphs are supplemented by a detailed, site specific description of the proposed action in Chapter 2 of the Environmental Assessment.

Commercial Timber Cutting to Meet the Primary Goal of Big Flat—Group Selection with Salvage and Sanitation

The proposed action would utilize group selection and sanitation and salvage harvest methods to remove merchantable trees in 41 forest stands throughout the project area. Group selection is an uneven aged (selection) silvicultural system designed to regenerate and maintain multi-aged structures by removing trees and establishing new age classes in small groups throughout the stand. Sanitation cutting is the removal of green trees to improve stand health by stopping or reducing the actual or anticipated spread of insects and disease. Salvage cutting is the removal of dead trees or trees damaged or dying because of injurious agents other than competition, to recover economic value that would otherwise be lost.

A commercial timber operator would accomplish the proposed treatments by cutting, skidding and hauling the trees from the sale area. Mechanized harvest would only occur on slopes less than 40 percent. Non-merchantable material at publicly accessible landings will be made available for fuel wood or biomass. Any remaining material at the landings will be piled and burned or scattered after fuel wood removal. Non-merchantable downed dead trees will be left

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1 All acreages in this document are approximations. While we make every effort to ensure the integrity of our data, various errors—such as GIS slivers and rounding—may lead to minor inaccuracies.

2 Silvicultural treatments are defined by the Dictionary of Forestry, published by the Society of American Foresters.
to stabilize soils and to provide shade shelter for planted conifer seedlings. Under this proposal up to approximately 1746 acres could be treated with group selection.

Engelmann spruce, ponderosa pine, and Douglas fir seedlings would be manually planted (where appropriate) within the harvest units. Manual planting methods would include hand scalping a 2’ X 2’ area for site preparation and auger or hoedad planting of containerized seedlings. Seedling species mix will be determined prior to planting based on factors such as previous tree species composition and aspect. Planting spacing would be irregular to develop a more natural appearance when the trees mature. Approximately 150 to 155 trees per acre would be planted, as described by the LRMP.

**Road Management to Meet the Primary Goal of Big Flat—Road Construction and Maintenance**

The proposed commercial timber harvest will use a combination of designated forest roads, motorized trails, and temporary roads for transportation. Designated roads and motorized trails totaling approximately 29 miles will be used for hauling and accessing cut timber. Haul roads used during harvest activities will be maintained through regularly scheduled grading. Portions of some existing roads may be improved to meet current Fishlake National Forest standards for timber hauling. The project will also require the construction of 28.5 miles of temporary roads. All temporary roads will be closed once the project is completed.

**Non-commercial Forest Vegetation Treatments to Meet Secondary Goals for Big Flat**

**Thinning and Stand Improvement**

The proposed action would utilize thinning and stand improvement methods to improve the composition and quality of desirable trees in 14 stands throughout the project area. Thinning is a cultural treatment made to reduce stand density of trees primarily to improve growth or enhance forest health. Stand improvement treatments may include improvement planting and improvement cutting, which are designed to restock stands with native species, while removing less desirable species. While not every acre of these stands will be treated, the total stand area for these 14 stands equals approximately 2825 acres.

**Fuel Reduction Treatments**

In 20 of the 41 stands proposed for commercial timber harvest, fuel reduction treatments are also proposed for strategic locations within the treated stands. Moreover, fuel reduction treatments are proposed for an additional 10 stands where commercial timber harvest will not occur. (Thus, fuel reduction treatments may occur in a total of 30 stands.) Fuel reduction treatments may include mechanical/manual treatments such as cutting, chipping, masticating small trees or limbs; prescribed fire treatments such as pile or broadcast burning; and aspen improvement treatments such as conifer removal or conifer jackstrawing. With the intent of reducing fire behavior in and around the 2300 acres of private property at the Eagle Point Ski Resort, the stands for fuel reduction treatments are generally downslope and to the south and west of the private property—which includes dozens of homes. Because access to these stands will be limited to areas of commercial treatment, or to locations accessible by existing roads and trails, the area of fuel reduction work will not exceed 2600 acres.

II. PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT
This biological assessment analyzes the potential effects of the proposed Big Flat Vegetation Management Project on all Threatened, Endangered, and Candidate (TEC) species on the Fishlake National Forest. The names and status of these species are shown in Table 2. The purpose of this biological assessment is to make a determination regarding the likely effects of the proposed action on the status of these species and determine whether formal consultation or conference with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is required. A pre-field analysis of the available habitat within the proposed project areas indicates that no suitable habitat occurs for the Utah prairie dog, California condor, Mexican spotted owl, greater sage-grouse, southwestern willow flycatcher, and western yellow-billed cuckoo nor is there any FWS designated habitat adjacent to the proposed project.

**Table 2.** Shown are names, status, and occurrence of habitat for the threatened, endangered, and candidate species that may occur on the Fishlake National Forest and provides a justification for eliminating from further evaluation those species that do not have suitable habitat or that do not occur in the project area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPECIES</th>
<th>STATUS</th>
<th>SUITABLE HABITAT</th>
<th>HABITAT UNSUITABLE BASED ON:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Utah Prairie Dog</td>
<td>Threatened</td>
<td>No known occurrence, nor any habitat designated by the Fish and Wildlife Service for this listed species within or adjacent to project area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cynomys parvidens</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>California condor (Gymnogyps californianus)</td>
<td>Endangered</td>
<td>No known occurrence, nor any habitat designated by the Fish and Wildlife Service for this listed species within or adjacent to project area.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo</td>
<td>Candidate</td>
<td>No known occurrence, nor any habitat designated by the Fish and Wildlife Service for this candidate species within or adjacent to project area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coccyzus americanus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greater sage-grouse (Centrocercus urophasianus)</td>
<td>Candidate</td>
<td>No suitable sage-steppe habitat within or adjacent to the project areas.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (Empidonax traillii extimus)</td>
<td>Endangered</td>
<td>No known occurrence, nor any habitat designated by the Fish and Wildlife Service for this listed species within or adjacent to project area.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican Spotted Owl</td>
<td>Threatened</td>
<td>No known occurrence, nor any habitat designated by the Fish and Wildlife Service for this listed species within or adjacent to project area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Strix occidentalis lucida)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Federal Status Code:
E = Endangered - Taxa formally listed as endangered.
T =Threatened - Taxa formally listed as threatened.
C = Candidate Species – Taxa considered for listing.

**III. CONSULTATION TO DATE**

On Sept. 20, 2015 a query of the US Fish and Wildlife Service listed species in Piute and Beaver Counties, Utah resulted in the species contained in Table 2—see web address below. The
Mexican Spotted owl was included in the table as it occurs elsewhere on the Forest, though not in Beaver, nor Piute Counties.


IV. SPECIES ACCOUNT, LIFE HISTORY AND HABITAT STATUS

For more information on threatened, endangered and proposed species please refer to, "Life History and Analysis of Endangered, Threatened, Candidate, Sensitive and Management Indicator Species of the Fishlake National Forest, Version 4.1 (Rodriguez 2006) (Spahr et al. 1991).

V. EFFECTS ANALYSIS

Because there are no known occurrences of Threatened, Endangered, or Candidate (TEC) wildlife species nor known suitable habitat within or adjacent to the project area, there will be no affects to those TEC species identified by FWS that may occur on the Fishlake National Forest.

VI. CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

Because there are known occurrences of Threatened, Endangered, or Candidate (TEC) wildlife species or identified suitable habitat within or adjacent to the project area, there will be no affects to those TEC species that may occur elsewhere on the Fishlake National Forest and no cumulative affects analysis associated with this proposed project.

VII. COMPLIANCE WITH MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

This biological assessment process has served to review the effects of implementing the proposed action for the Twitchell Fire Salvage Sale Project on threatened, endangered and candidate wildlife. Adverse impacts, which may affect the viability of the species, have been avoided.

VIII. DETERMINATION

As a result of this assessment, it is my professional determination that the proposed Big Flat Vegetation Management Project will have no effect on any Threatened, Endangered, or Candidate wildlife species.

IX. MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS
The following management criteria are recommended:

1. Report and record any sightings or reports of threatened, endangered and candidate species and implement appropriate protection measures as stated in any recovery plan.
2. Continue cooperation with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service to recover listed species.

X. LITERATURE CITED


Appendix A. Maps
Figure 1. Shown is the location of the proposed Big Flat Vegetation Management project on the Beaver Ranger District, Fishlake National Forest.